

Opening Statement of Subcommittee Chairman Shimkus
Subcommittee on Environment
Markup of H.R. 2278, H.R. 2378
June 27, 2018

(As prepared for delivery)

This morning, the Subcommittee on Environment will markup two bills to reauthorize Department of Energy (DOE) environmental remediation programs.

Last month, we received testimony on H.R. 2389, to reauthorize the West Valley demonstration project. We heard three different perspectives about challenges and opportunities at the West Valley, New York site. The bill's sponsor, Congressman Tom Reed, highlighted the importance of advancing cleanup at the West Valley location for his constituents and local communities in his district. A Department of Energy witness provided a historical perspective as the Federal government partner on the ground, carrying out the statutory programs over the last 38 years pursuant to the West Valley Demonstration Project Act. And the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, or NYSERDA, offered the host state's viewpoint on the importance of expediting cleanup activities at the site and transferring responsibility to dispose of the material to the Federal government.

I recognize the State of New York's interest in eliminating DOE's statutory prohibition on disposing high-level radioactive waste generated at the site over fifty years ago. There are different forms and quantities of this material at the site and we know that some of the high-level radioactive waste from reprocessing spent nuclear fuel must be sent to a deep geologic repository at the Yucca Mountain, Nevada site, as required by the Nuclear Waste Policy Act. As we heard, DOE is not expected to complete cleanup at the site until the mid-2040's and so efforts of the House of Representatives to get our nation's nuclear waste management program back on track is critical for this disposal pathway.

To get a better understanding of alternative disposal paths for the remainder of the radioactive waste, Congress needs additional information. The Amendment in the Nature of a Substitute for H.R. 2389 will help gather that information by directing the Government Accountability Office to identify the volumes and types of radioactive waste at the site, disposal options for the waste streams including costs and timeframes, and benefits and challenges of each disposal option. This information will enable Congress to make a fully informed decision in the future.

We will also consider H.R. 2278, the Responsible Disposal Reauthorization Act of 2017, introduced by Representative Scott Tipton and cosponsored by my colleague on the Subcommittee on Environment, Representative Diana DeGette. In 1996, Congress authorized operations at the Cheney disposal cell in Mesa County, Colorado for 27 years, until September 30, 2023. Ranking Member Pallone helped get the original bill enacted as the Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Energy and Power in the 104th Congress. The bill before us today proactively extends the date for the uranium mill tailings disposal cell in Mesa County, Colorado to operate for another 25 years.

I look forward to passing these bipartisan bills and continuing to advance policies to help the Department meet its environmental cleanup goals and obligations.